

UNITED STATES
DEPARTMENT OF
AGRICULTURE

NATURAL RESOURCES
CONSERVATION
SERVICE

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May 28, 1997

(Revised)

SUBJECT: NRCS Resources Available for Non-Structural Alternatives

TO: Paul Dobie, Interagency Task Force Staff Chief, FAX 916-364-3107

This is in response to your request for information on funds available for non-structural alternatives. USDA-NRCS has two programs that provide opportunities for non-structural alternatives:

Emergency Watershed Protection Program: This encompasses (1) the traditional program, which includes such projects as streambank stabilization, revegetation, debris cleanout, levee repair, etc. Funds for these activities are not specified as "structural" or "nonstructural", but are available for any eligible projects.

"Traditional" program funds now available in California: \$2,085,000.

Supplemental pending: (unfunded requests that are awaiting passage of federal supplemental appropriations act): \$4.2 million. Note: We can increase this as we receive more eligible requests)

(2) A new authority under the EWP is Flood Plain Easements. This gives NRCS the authority to purchase flood plain easements in areas damaged by floods. No funds are now available, but the federal supplemental appropriations act is expected to provide funds for this purpose. The House version provides \$10 million for the nation; the Senate version provides \$20 million. The conference version is not yet resolved. What portion of those funds will be available to California is not known.

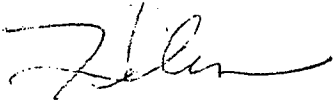
Wetlands Reserve Program: This program purchases easements on land that can be restored to wetland. Funds now available in California for FY 1997 are \$6.7 million. However, please note that we have already held a signup and have more requests in hand than this amount will fund. It is possible to get more money from the national office if additional opportunities are found, particularly if funding from other sources (at least 25%, preferably more, from other state, local, federal, or private sources). A potential threat to this program is that some Congressmen have proposed offsetting the federal supplemental appropriations act by decreases in other USDA programs; one such proposal is to reduce the WRP program funds by \$19 million nationally.

NRCS is pursuing an opportunity on the Lower San Joaquin to restore to wetland conditions a large area adjacent to the existing San Luis Wildlife Refuge. NRCS is proposing to provide \$5 million for this purpose; at this time it is uncertain whether these funds will be through the Flood Plain Easements authority and funds or through the Wetlands Reserve Program. The project is eligible under either program, and the decision on which program funds to use will depend on several factors, including availability of each type of funds and the acceptability of the use of these funds to the local community.

(NATIONWIDE)

On May 20, I testified to a joint hearing of the California Senate Agriculture and Water Resources Committee and the Assembly Water, Parks, and Wildlife Committee, in support of the California flood bond bill. At the conclusion of my testimony (copy attached), Senator Costa asked me for a compilation of the federal resources available to address nonstructural alternatives. Patrick Wright of EPA and I were working on how to collect that information; it sounds as if the response you get to this request will probably satisfy him. May I have a copy of the responses you collect to provide to Senator Costa and Assemblyman Machado (the other sponsor of the bill)? Or do you intend to provide it to them? I'd greatly appreciate your response to me on this.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read 'Helen R. Flach', with a stylized, flowing script.

HELEN R. FLACH
Assistant State Conservationist

FUNDING

Currently, the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers is the only agency that readily has funding specifically available for non-structural alternatives. The Interagency Task Force staff has queried the various agencies involved with little success in the identification of funds that are specifically available for non-structural alternatives. Agencies such as the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and the Natural Resources Conservation Service have funds that must be related to other programs associated with wetlands, refuge, and habitat restoration. A short discussion of each agency follows:

(1) NRCS - The Emergency Watershed Protection Program (EWP) encompasses (1) the traditional program, which includes such projects as streambank stabilization, revegetation, debris cleanout, levee repair, etc. Funds for these activities are not specified as "structural" or "nonstructural", but are available for any eligible projects. "Traditional" program funds now available in California amount to \$2,085,000. A new authority under the EWP is Flood Plain Easements. This provides NRCS the authority to purchase flood plain easements in areas damaged by floods. No funds are now available, but the supplemental appropriation is expected to provide for these funds (\$10-20M). Policy may need to be developed to implement this new authority. The Wetlands Reserve Program (WRP) can be used to purchase easements on land that can be restored to wetlands. Funds in California for FY97 are \$6.7M, however, NRCS currently has more requests in hand than funds. A potential threat to this program is that some in Congress have proposed offsetting the Federal supplemental by decreases in other USDA programs to include reducing the WRP by \$19M nationally.

(2) NMFS has no funding available since all FY97 funds in the Southwest Region are earmarked for salmon habitat restoration. Any funding used for NSAs would require reprogramming actions.

(3) CALFED funding for activities related to implementation of NSAs must be related to activities associated with refuge expansion, etc. There are currently no funds earmarked specifically for NSA activities. However, CALFED has indicated there may be funds under Category 3 funding for NSAs. This is to be pursued by CALFED.

(4) Fish and Wildlife Service funds reflect \$384K for technical assistance and \$5M identified in the supplemental appropriation for land purchases associated with the San Joaquin National Wildlife Refuge. The FY98 budget includes approximately \$4.4M for the San Joaquin refuge also. The FWS does not expect final action related to the San Joaquin Wildlife Refuge to occur until early FY98. There are currently no funds identified for projects specifically related to non-structural alternatives.

(5) FEMA currently has no specific funding identified for non structural alternatives. There may be some funding assistance through the Hazard Mitigation Program for relocation.

(6) Bureau of Land Management has indicated they have no funds available for NSAs. However, in those Reclamation Districts for which they are members, flowage easements could be accomplished through land exchanges.

(7) U.S. Army Corps of Engineers. The Corps currently has approximately \$14M in the Flood Control and Coastal Emergencies appropriation available to fund some non-structural alternatives. The pending supplemental has \$415 M in the House and \$390M in the Senate version of the bill that could be made available. Conference action is pending.

(8) Bureau of Reclamation. No specific funds were identified as being available for non-structural alternatives. What has been identified is the authority to plan, design, and construct environmental restoration measures consistent with the Central Valley Project Improvement Act. This authority includes the ability to purchase lands. There is about \$50-60M in this program this year for California but use in the NSA process must be linked to environmental restoration measures.